PROTECT THE PROTEST
DO WE CARE?

WHY THIS ZINE EXISTS

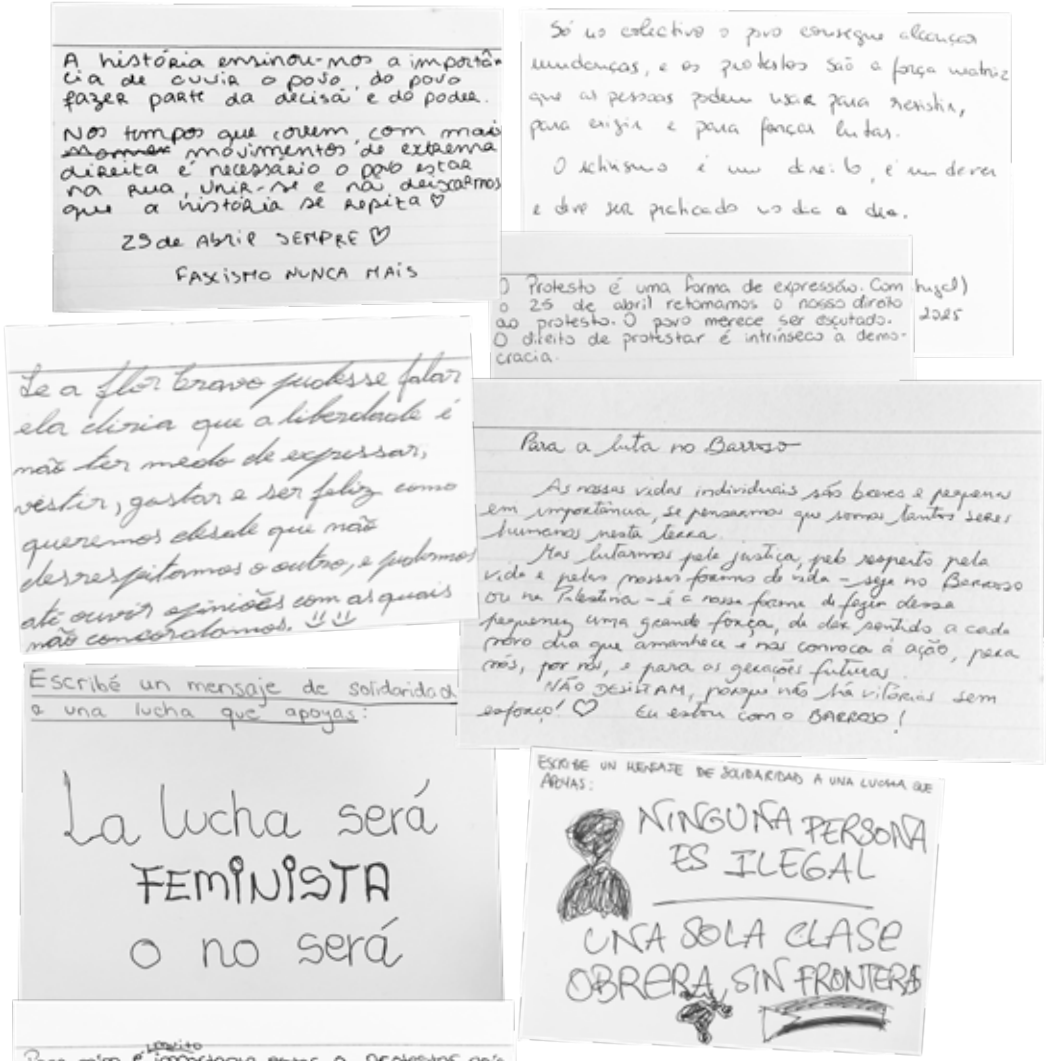
Across Europe, the right to protest is under threat. As Amnesty International's report *Under Protected and Over Restricted* details, states are increasingly using stigmatising narratives and repressive tactics to dismantle collective action. In the face of this, protestors are not only defending their right to demonstrate but are also actively building networks of mutual support to sustain their struggles. This zine exists to recognise and encourage that vital work. It is a collection of testimonies and tools centered on care**,** not as an afterthought, but as a fundamental, radical practice of protection and resistance.

If the state refuses to protect its people, we will learn to protect each other.

The testimonies documented here were gathered through direct encounters at protests and sites of resistance. Experimenting with different exercises, we asked a simple and essential question: what does it mean to care for one another when standing up for justice? The answers, from emotional debriefings and buddy systems to magical objects for safety, reveal a profound truth: care is hard work but also the lymph of lasting resistance. By publishing these reflections, we hope to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of protest, one where collective wellbeing is the foundation of collective power.

CARE KIT

For this exercise, we asked people to imagine what a safety kit during protests could look like. We entered the realm of the surreal and came up with magic, powerful objects that people might need to care for each other or for themselves on the ground. What tool would you add into the kit?



SOLIDARITY LETTERS

During the protests, we asked people to write messages of solidarity with other struggles, both within and beyond their own territories, creating a collection of visual dialogues between protestors from different countries through hand-drawn postcards.
The fact that most people sent their messages to struggles not directly connected to the reasons they were protesting reveals a touching sense of mutual support across different movements. Intersectionality lives on the ground and at the heart of activist struggles.

Care For a Territory in Resistance

In the village of Barroso, northern Portugal, a community is resisting a lithium mining project. Our visit revealed a deep, intimate form of care—care for the land as an extension of the self. Here, resistance is nourished by a relationship with the territory, where protecting the soil, water, and communal life is the ultimate act of care for future generations

RESIST WITH REASON

"when we speak of resistance here, we always talk about baldios (commons)"
"I have been here for two years and I start seeing the psychological and physical consequences on me, working the land is a hard job, you give a lot of yourself to be able to live off what nature gives you. It becomes a culture of being strong psychologically and physically to resist to the weather and many other things, and that's also resistance to protect all the incredible things we have here."

TO BE HERE

"During the Zapatista "gira por la vida" there was an important question present in me, something that concerns us all and at the same time it is very intimate. It is about everything that Zapatistas bring with them, the sense of community, the connection with the land. In Europe it is very hard to find struggles where we can be political communities in defence of a land. I felt that in my trajectory I did not have a real connection with a territory to defend but when I arrived here, even before the intellectual realisation, I felt it in my body. To resist in a territory that's defending itself in Europe is what made most sense to me."
"Bit by bit I start being part of this land. Knowing a territory also nourishes you, and the territory itself is nourishing. Like when I getting water not from the tap but from the spring, the body enters the land and gets to know it and you build a relationship of respect. I try to be part of this territory as much as I can."

AND CALL OUT

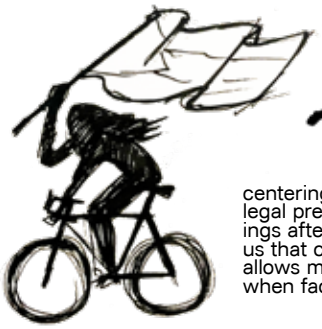
"You know, this famous question, 'what are your needs?' - I always feel panic when I hear this question because I don't have clear answers. Apart from saying that there is a crowdfunding and people can send money to support us with the expenses for the reconstruction or for the lawyers, it is also a matter of care for the territory, but I don't want to put pressure on people to come here."

*"*It is a fight that requires physical availability to be able to go in front of the machines, but also of presence. For example when we go outside to visit Coimbra, Covas, Lisboa, Porto and talk about what's happening, we have to worry about who stays with the cows, who will take care of the garden and so on. It is not news that we need more people, surely more people that can give technical support and that can do things from outside as well, but we mostly need people on the territory. There is a house that we got recently that still needs a lot of work, but it could host people for short and longer periods of time. The house will be a concrete space that opens up the possibility of *staying* and **the opportunity of initiating projects that have nothing to do with the mine. For example I have two projects in mind that I do not have capacities to think about, because we have to be in the mountains or do other things, and I hope the house becomes this space of experimentation and will allow them to happen. So yes, we need more people."

A SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN PROTESTS

"Today, the *Unione Sindacale di Base* and grassroots unions called a general strike against the genocide in Palestine, and here we are, two years later, saying no to genocide and calling for a halt to all agreements with Israel. There are students, unions, social centres, ordinary people. I am seeing people I have never seen on strike before coming here to the square today; I don't know where he is, but my father is also here somewhere" (...) Feeling part of the same ideal is also the meaning of *Climate Pride*, which I organise, this event that speaks of symbiosis and alliances, and the meaning is also to succeed, despite all our differences as human beings, as people who live in a society that wants us to be individualistic and very closed in our little offices, in finding ourselves together in the square and recognising each other. Even without knowing each other, being able to recognise ourselves in the same reality is wonderful. Before coming here, I started chanting from my bike, chanting "Free Palestine" in "Free Palestine". It was wonderful to see how people look at you a little strangely at first and then recognise you and what you are doing, and this is a bit like the sense of community that is created, which you seek in life but which is very easy to find here."

"In my opinion, this is kind of the point of care: knowing that not everyone can, wants to, or has the strength and opportunity to go further against the grain, whatever action you want to take. (...) The feminist or transfeminist movement has certainly helped all movements in Italy to implement care in the streets, to always be aware of who is around you, who is next to you, and who you need to protect your sisters, the most vulnerable people, children, people with disabilities or people who simply do not want to be in the mess. So, in recent years, I definitely feel much more confident about going into more conflictual situations than I did ten years ago."



In Rome, we joined a general strike for Palestine and spoke with activists from various movements. Their testimonies detailed a culture of care meticulously woven into the fabric of protest—from welfare roles and centering exercises before marches, to legal preparation and emotional debriefings after direct actions. They showed us that care is the strategic work that allows movements to endure, especially when facing repression and violence.

CARE BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE PROTEST

"Care is very important. That's why we have different practices, both before, during and after protests or actions. We usually have a moment of centring, of emotional sharing about how we are feeling, what energies we have at that moment. And when we take action, we usually work in pairs so you are never alone, there is always someone by your side with whom you can share your needs, your requirements, and even your fears. And that person is always close to you at all times, so it is constant support. During protests, there are also welfare roles, which are people who carry a rucksack with water, food, and whatever else is needed depending on the action. For example, if it is raining, people also have extra K-Way jackets and umbrellas, or if it is sunny, they have sunscreen. In short, whatever is necessary for the specific situation. And finally, after the action, we have a moment of emotional debriefing, so we gather in a place usually far from the action, whether it's a park or some other natural setting. We sit in a circle and share how we feel emotionally, how it went, and what we need at that moment." - Marte

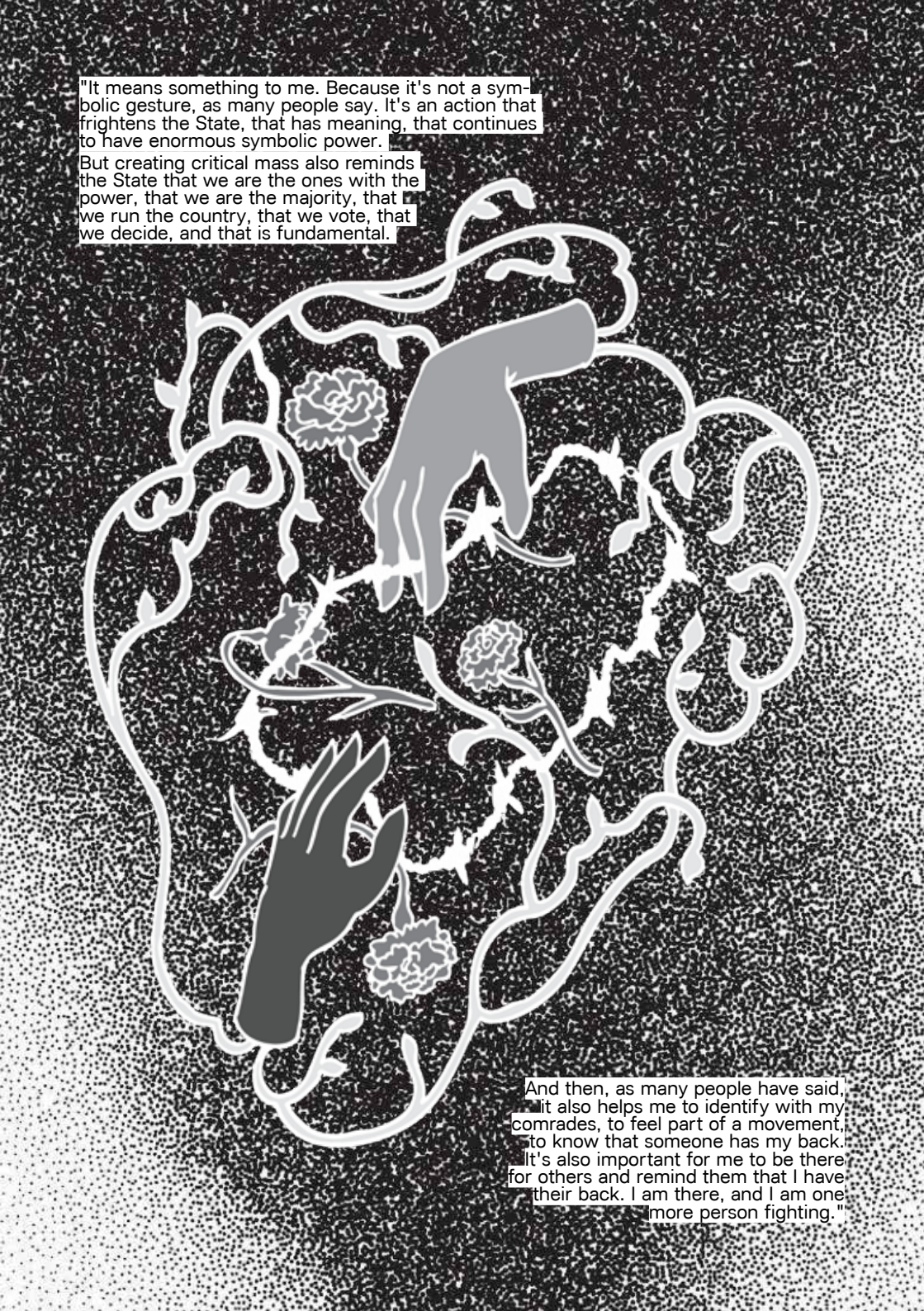
"I suffer from anxiety attacks, but when I am at a protest, I don't get them because I am with my sisters, and I try to look at other people to see if anyone is not feeling well and help them."

"There is a difference between demonstrations such as these marches and sit-ins in the square and the direct actions I do with XR. In terms of legal risk, demonstrations in the square are usually authorised, so they give me more peace of mind, more of a sense of belonging, recognition and closeness. Being together with people who share my values. Whereas during XR actions, there is a much higher legal risk because we do things like block or disrupt services. So there is a very strong adrenaline rush. It feels like I'm in a film every time. There are many emotions: fear of violence from the police, but also a sense of power because you are involved in disruptive action, and a sense of community because you have all your comrades around you, you often look each other in the eye, which gives you a lot of confidence and strengthens the sense of community."

"In cases of direct action, taking care also means training and preparing for a situation of violence. It also means legal preparation, having legal support behind you and knowing what you are doing, the risks you are taking and being ready for repression."

TESTIMONIES BY PROTESTERS ON DURING PALESTINE PROTESTS ON THE 22ND OF SEPTEMBER 2025, ROME

GROUP PORTRAIT ON RIGHT BY PROTESTERS ON FREEDOM DAY, THE 25TH OF APRIL, LISBON


"It means something to me. Because it's not a symbolic gesture, as many people say. It's an action that frightens the State, that has meaning, that continues to have enormous symbolic power.
But creating critical mass also reminds the State that we are the ones with the power, that we are the majority, that we run the country, that we vote, that we decide, and that is fundamental.
And then, as many people have said, it also helps me to identify with my comrades, to feel part of a movement, to know that someone has my back. It's also important for me to be there for others and remind them that I have their back. I am there, and I am one more person fighting."